

WHAT OUR ATTRACTION TO LOVE-TO-HATE CHARACTERS  
SAYS ABOUT THE SELF

by

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What our Attraction to Love-to-Hate Characters Says About the Self

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“Love-to-hate” characters are fictional characters who do bad things or who are considered villains, but they still draw viewers to them. We often disapprove of people who behave in this way, so why do we connect with these characters and is our connection to them similar to the connection we make with characters we unambiguously admire? This exploratory study will use previously collected data ( $N=498$ ) to investigate the qualities of love-to-hate characters in popular media. College students rated love-to-hate characters, as well as themselves and characters they admire, on 40 evaluative traits (both likable and unlikable). Certain traits were consistently associated with the love-to-hate characters. Additional analyses will compare the Euclidean distance between the self and a love-to-hate character to the distance between the self and an unambiguously admired character in order to identify aspects of love-to-hate characters that potentially mirror some aspect of the self.

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## Introduction

Since the earliest plays and stories, there have been good and bad characters. And although everyone loves a hero, we also seem to be interested in experiencing life through the perspective of a character who is burdened by challenges and ethical dilemmas, someone who could be a good *character* but might not be a good *person*. “Love-to-hate” characters are the characters who sometimes act in unlikeable ways or are considered villains but have something about them that draws audiences to root for their success and even seek out the story specifically because of them (*Draco in Leather Pants*, n.d; Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d.). We may not forgive the actions of these love-to-hate characters if someone in our everyday lives preformed them, but we have no trouble looking past them – maybe even reveling in them – in a movie or a TV show. Why do we connect with characters that act in unlikeable ways and what does that say about us? In this thesis we will do an exploratory study to understand what it is about those love-to-hate characters that pulls us in, and what in turn this might say about the self.

*What is a love-to-hate character?*

Love-to-hate characters are described mainly as a popular media trope. These characters are not a new concept, but in recent years the immediacy of streaming services has assisted in a growing popularity of love-to-hate characters, especially because of the social aspects that participating in the online chatter of trending shows/movies can provide (Umesh & Bose, 2019). Popular examples are Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter*, Loki from the Marvel Franchise, and Cruella Deville of *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*. These characters are considered villains in their respective films or TV shows, yet we might root for their success and even sometimes primarily choose to consume the media content because of them. Although we can encounter

these characters in both books and visual media, this thesis will focus on characters in TV and movies exclusively.

Some of the most common adjectives to describe these characters are charismatic, confident, attractive, unapologetic, interesting, cathartic, loyal, motivated, stylish, humorous, and intelligent (*Draco in Leather Pants*, n.d; Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d.). There is a wide range of variability, but across many different accounts and understandings of these characters, certain traits frequently emerge. These characters have done mean, harmful, or immoral things that we as media consumers can acknowledge yet look past because of their other charming and exciting traits (*Love to Hate*, n.d.). Their unapologetic nature and the enjoyment they seem to derive from their actions may possibly give viewers a way to experience what it would feel like to do something they know is bad and not socially acceptable, without experiencing any consequences (*Love to Hate*, n.d.).

The idea of “catharsis” is a common theme in the postings about love-to-hate characters. Although there are different interpretations, catharsis refers to a release of deep emotions in a singular moment or experience (American Psychological Association, n.d.). The online blogs and posts tend to use this term in a more causal sense, as a way to experience pent-up emotions through watching a character. Possibly, we can’t morally engage in wrongdoings on our own, but letting someone else do the things we wish we could do leads to an emotional release and enjoyment.

The most definable feature of love-to-hate characters is the ambiguity of their actions and traits. These characters represent some combination of likeable and unlikeable traits, with behavior that isn’t clearly good or bad (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012). Additional information about the intentions of the characters, the greater context, or a good reason for their unlikeable

behavior can often make it difficult to define them as clearly a villain or hero, but instead somewhere in between.

There is a spectrum of love-to-hate characters, including darker ones who align with what's known in Psychology as the Dark Triad. This personality triangle includes psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism, traits often exhibited in love-to-hate characters and villains in general. Research on the Dark Triad has shown that characters with these traits are on the whole evil, unapologetic, and immoral (Snyder et.al, 2019). There isn't a redeeming aspect to their behavior such as a context that puts the evil act in perspective. Dark Triad traits tend to be understood as socially undesirable when they are researched in a real-world context, but when it comes to characters, we find the experience of interacting with these traits through the screen enjoyable (Snyder et.al., 2019). It may therefore be interesting to understand the Dark Triad in terms of love-to-hate characters since we are not drawn to people in real life with these qualities, but we may be capable of enjoying them in our TV/film consumption. Although not all love-to-hate characters have this triad, understanding how we think about these qualities may point to which differentiating traits we enjoy watching on the screen that are starkly different from what we approve of in real life.

This desire to explore the dark traits doesn't apply to all viewers; many people enjoy love-to-hate characters for their comedic presence (Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d.). Humor is a socially desirable trait that is viewed positively when choosing a romantic partner, a friend, or when looking to connect with others (Cann & Matson, 2014). It follows that we find it easy to connect with characters in this way. Commonly, love-to-hate characters have a quick come back or a snappy joke (Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d.). This may give us a reason or excuse to look past bad behavior. In addition, there is the element of the style or look of the character. Whether



this is based on physical attraction or on a specific costume, having a “look” has been reported as an enjoyable aspect of these love-to-hate characters (Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d.). We like an eccentric, flashy costume, or an attractive actor on the screen.

It may also be that love-to-hate characters do exhibit admirable qualities as well as unlikeable ones. When thinking about characters that people enjoy watching, we can think about characters we root for and empathize with, those who acts in a generally good and heroic way. Some of these qualities include kindness, courage, integrity, honesty, and so on (Master Class, 2021; One Stop for Writers, n.d.). This thesis will explore how admirable characters compare to love-to-hate characters to understand if a difference does exist between the two, or if part of the reason we like love-to-hate characters is because they still act in admirable ways at times.

#### *Previous Research on Similarity Between the Self and Characters*

Commonly love-to-hate characters are seen as vessels for entertainment, but we can also find a measurable connection between the self and the characters we engage with. Therefore, choosing to watch love-to-hate characters may tell us something about ourselves. Although research about love-to-hate characters is minimal, there has been some research on the elements that make up these characters, and what we learn about the self. One question that emerges is whether the traits and behaviors a character exhibits mirror some part of ourselves, and if so, is it our unlikeable traits, our likeable traits, or a bit of both that get mirrored?

One common way of studying similarity is through self-other overlap, which is defined as a representation of the other as a part of the self and explains the experience of closeness when we cognitively overlap and relate to another (Kang et. al., 2010). If we think about a Venn diagram with the individual self as one circle and the other person in a relationship as the other circle, then self-other overlap represents the space shared by both individuals. When overlap

exists, we think of ourselves less as solely an individual, but more a collective unit with the other. It has been found that this cognitive experience pertains not only to those we have relationships within real life, but also with fictional characters (Shedlosky et al., 2014). Measuring similarity is a common method used to measure self-other overlap in previous research. This thesis will take a slightly different approach and explore the *distance* between characters and the self, and what the different distances tells us about relative similarity.

Looking broadly at good and bad characters, one study by Shedlosky, Costabile, and Arkin (2014) explored how the experiences of characters on the screen impact a participant's own life through cognitive overlap and self-expansion. Researchers concluded that participants' cognitive overlap increased the more the characters mirrored participants' own characteristics. Furthermore, characters provide people the potential for self-expansion – that is, people's tendency to grow in emotions, challenges, interests and more. Self-expansion occurs through close relationships with others – whether real others or fictional characters (Shedlosky et al., 2014). The impact on self-expansion increases the more closely the character exemplifies the participant's ideal self (Shedlosky et al., 2014). This connection supports the phenomenon of self-other overlap with characters and allows for research such as this current study to further explore where the overlap between participants and characters arises. Specifically looking at love-to-hate characters for this overlap allows us to explore how we relate to characters differently than people in our daily lives on less likeable qualities and whether we still find similarity when a character may *not* exemplify our ideal self.

In addition, researchers Hoffner and Buchanan (2009) studied individuals perceived similarity and self-identification with characters who were rated on perceived success, violence, intelligence, humor and most notably for this thesis, admiration (among other attributes). They

found that characters that were perceived as admirable had higher levels of self-identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2009). In other words, participants felt they were closely related to admirable characters. This is relevant for this project because we will be exploring how admired characters are similar or different in their trait ratings to love-to-hate characters and to the self. This inquiry may suggest that we find similarity between the self and admired characters.

Similarly, self-other overlap and character similarity have previously been explored with immoral characters. Greenwood, Ribieras, and Clifton (2020) studied the Dark Triad, aggression, and moral disengagement, traits commonly associated with villains and antiheroes. Aggression, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism of the characters were the best predictors of who participants most enjoyed watching (Greenwood et al., 2020). In addition, the researchers found that the participant's own dark traits predicted more consumption or enjoyment of characters that act in a similar manner (Greenwood et al., 2020). In other words, there seems to be a link between the characters we choose to watch and our own behaviors and traits – and this holds even for negative behaviors and traits.

Similarly, research conducted by Krause and Rucker (2020) explored the idea of the self-concept with villainous characters. They found that watching immoral characters who do bad things on the screen causes no threat to the self-concept, therefore allowing us to suspend our normal moral judgment and enjoy watching the character. They also found that participants liked watching villains that were similar to themselves, suggesting that we are drawn in by characters that are similar, whether or not their characteristics are negative or positive (Krause & Rucker, 2020). This is relevant to the current thesis, because we are interested in understanding if there is any similarity between the character's traits and the participants' traits and how this similarity may explain some level of enjoyment in watching these love-to-hate characters.

### *Previous Research on Immoral Characters and Villains*

Beyond self-other overlap, there has been a lot of conversation surrounding how immoral characters are perceived by the viewer, and how those perceptions change when their behavior is complicated, morally ambiguous, or some combination of good and bad. As stated earlier, it may seem that characters who do bad things would be disliked, yet this is not the trend we see. Konijn and Hoorn (2005) suggested that even villainous characters produce high appreciation comparable to heroic characters. Similar to other studies, Konijn and Hoorn also noted that part of the reason we enjoy watching media about these villains, or love-to-hate characters, is because we get to experience things we may be curious about without any personal consequences or the social shame of participating in immoral behavior. They also found that characters that had a combination of both positive and negative traits were actually more likable than characters on either end of the spectrum, (e.g., those who were all good or all bad; Konijn & Hoorn, 2005).

Another study by Snyder and colleagues (2019) explored the Dark Triad personality and found that Dark Triad characters were overall less liked than non-Dark Triad characters. However, they also found that there was no significant relationship between how much participants liked a character and how much they wanted to watch the media in which the character appeared (Snyder et al., 2019). This study finds similar themes of the darker characters balancing their unlikeable and likeable traits in a way that draws viewers in, even if the viewers may not like them. However, the authors explored themes of liking for characters who do bad things *before* the participant is familiar with the character. In other words, the study examined people's initial reaction to the character with no previous knowledge of the character's habits, backstory, or beliefs. The current thesis will, in contrast, explore characters from media that participants are familiar with.

A different study by Krakowiak and Oliver (2012) looked at the relationship between liking characters that are good, bad, and morally ambiguous and viewer enjoyment. Enjoyment was operationalized both as affective responses such as happiness, and secondly as a desire to engage with the media. Krakowiak and Oliver found that participants seemed to base their evaluation of characters on the ratio of bad and good. The most liked characters were good ones, followed by ambiguous ones, and lastly bad ones. However, morally ambiguous characters and good characters were both *enjoyed* to the same degree, even though good characters were liked more (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012). This suggests that both good and bad traits make a morally ambiguous character engaging, and our enjoyment of watching them may be separate from what we would say about their behavior and likability in real life.

### *Current Research*

There is a clear pattern that watching characters' bad traits does not prevent us from enjoying watching them be bad. In real life we do not generally approve of people who do bad things, and it seems as if there are some characters we flat-out hate, others we admire. Some of the most compelling characters, though, fall somewhere in between. What do those characters we love-to-hate have in common if anything? And do we see something of ourselves in them that explains why we like them so much? Through this exploratory study I will attack this general question with three bite-sized questions that will hopefully lead to a greater understanding of our motivation for or reasoning behind enjoying watching bad characters:

1. What traits are most common in love-to-hate characters?
2. How do traits used to describe love-to-hate characters, admired characters, and the self differ?
3. Who is closer to the self, love-to-hate characters or admired characters?

## Method:

### *Preliminary Character Identification Study*

Prior to analyzing the data used in our main study (described below), we first used data from a preliminary character identification study, in order to find candidate characters in the categories of love-to-hate and admire, which we then utilized in the main study. In the preliminary character identification study, student participants ( $N=421$ ) answered questions on a survey where they were given six different choices of popular video or book series (*Grey's Anatomy*, *Harry Potter*, *New Girl*, *Star Wars*, *The Vampire Diaries* and the Marvel Franchise – the Marvel Franchise set consists of characters who appear in both TV shows and movies throughout the so-called “Marvel Universe”). Students in this preliminary study were drawn from the same population as the main study. They were asked to choose one series from any of the six media sources they were familiar with. Participants were then asked to answer questions about the characters from this media source:

Which character do you most identify with?

Which character do you most admire?

Which character do you most dislike?

Which character do you most love-to-hate?

Which character do you find the most memorable?

The six media sets and responses were used to identify admired and love-to-hate characters. Some characters were mentioned frequently in more than one category (e.g., love, dislike, etc.) in the preliminary study. However, the most frequently listed character for each category for each show were selected to use in the main study. Characters were only deemed

“admired” or “love-to-hate” if they were chosen a minimum 20% of the time for these categories from a particular media source. This gave us four love-to-hate characters: Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker (selected by 36% of participants who chose to rate the *Star Wars* characters), Winston Schmidt (selected by 21.2% of participants who chose to rate the *New Girl* characters), Draco Malfoy (selected by 28.1% of participants who chose to rate the *Harry Potter* characters), and Loki (selected by 21.6% of participants who chose to rate the Marvel characters). This yielded five admired characters to use in the current study: Tony Stark (selected by 26.6% of participants who chose to rate the Marvel characters), Hermione Granger (selected by 26.8% of participants who chose to rate the *Harry Potter* characters), Jessica Day (selected by 31% of participants who chose to rate the *New Girl* characters), Christina Yang (selected by 23% of the participants who chose to rate the *Grey’s Anatomy* characters), and lastly Damon Salvatore (selected by 30% of participants who chose to rate *The Vampire Diaries* characters).

## **Main Study**

### *Participants*

The sample in the main study consisted of 498 undergraduate students at the University of Oregon. Students participated in exchange for credit towards a course research assignment. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 38 years old ( $M = 19.48$ ;  $SD = 1.87$ ).

In total, 62.65% were female, 31.12% were male, and 2.01% were either nonbinary, genderqueer/gender-nonconforming, agender, or genderfluid; 4.22% selected two or more gender categories. When asked, 95.28% of participants reported being cisgender, 2.01% reported being transgender, and 2.41% selected uncertain or “prefer not to answer.”

The participants were 68.27% White, 14.86% mixed race, 7.43% Asian, 5.40% Hispanic or Latine, 2.01% Black or African American, and less than one percent of Native American,

Middle Eastern or North African, Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian, and less than 1% who chose not to answer.

### *Procedure*

Participants in the main study completed a questionnaire online. They were first presented with the six media franchises (listed above) that had been used in the preliminary character identification study and asked to choose the one with which they were most familiar. Once they had chosen one, they answered questions about four specified characters from that media set. For four of the media sets, this included a love-to-hate character (Darth Vader from *Star Wars*; Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter*; Loki from the Marvel Franchise; or Schmidt from *New Girl*). There was no clear love-to-hate character in either *The Vampire Diaries* or *Grey's Anatomy*. For five of the media sets, there was also an admired character (Christina Yang from *Grey's Anatomy*; Damon Salvatore from *The Vampire Diaries*; Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*; Tony Stark from the Marvel Franchise; and Jessica Day from *New Girl*). There was no clear admired character from *Star Wars*, in large part because many of the characters from this media set were admired, so that no one stood out.

Participants were presented with 40 adjectives (adapted from Chandler, 2018) and asked how well each trait described them on a 7-point scale from 1, “extremely inaccurate,” to 7, “extremely accurate.” They were also asked how well the adjectives described each of the four specified characters selected from the media set they had chosen, using the same 7-point scale. In addition, participants were asked to rate the general likeability of each trait, also on a 1-7 scale; where 1= “dislike a great deal” and 7 = “like a great deal.” (In addition, participants were also asked to rate how much they liked or disliked the four *characters*, as well as how much they admired the characters. These ratings will not be used in this thesis; however, they are mentioned



to provide the complete study methodology as these ratings were interspersed with ratings that will be analyzed.) A complete list of questions used in the study asked can be found in the Appendix.

## Results:

For love-to-hate characters, 106 participants answered questions about Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter*, 127 answered for Loki from the Marvel Franchise, 42 participants answered for Darth Vader from *Star Wars*, and 65 answered for Schmidt from *New Girl*.

Initially, 103 responses regarding Schmidt were analyzed however, we re-ran our analysis rankings of the Schmidt character data from *New Girl* because of a suspected miscommunication with the name. In the show *New Girl*, it is revealed a number of episodes into the show that Schmidt (who is identified most of the show with only one name) is actually named Winston Schmidt (Wagmeister, 2017). This may have been confusing for our participants because there is another character in the show named Winston Bishop. Therefore, we suspect many individuals were confused when seeing two characters named Winston on the survey and may have misattributed traits to Winston Schmidt (one of our love-to-hate characters) instead of to Winston Bishop. This possible confusion was discovered because the preliminary character identification survey asked participants about the perception of the character's race, and many reported that the character named Winston Schmidt (a character played by a White man) was Black, which is the race of the actor who plays Winston Bishop. Therefore, we reran the descriptive statistics without the participants who seemed to be mixing up Winston Schmidt with the other Winston from the show. In doing this we went from having 103 participants rating Schmidt's traits to just 65. Although this correction left a smaller sample, we believe the trade-off was worth it in order to eliminate the possible noise from traits associated with the other Winston character and to yield higher quality data about traits that are specific or important to love-to-hate characters.

### *Descriptive Means*

Our first research question was to identify which traits tend to be the most descriptive of the different types of characters in a series, especially love-to-hate characters. For this, we examined the mean ratings for how descriptive a trait was of a character on all 40 of the traits. We rank-ordered these means separately for the love-to-hate characters, the admired characters, and the self in order from most to least descriptive. We also rank-ordered the likeability ratings of the traits.

To identify the most descriptive traits of love-to-hate characters, we created a new variable (referred to below as AL2H) which collapsed across mean trait ratings of the four love-to-hate characters (giving us ratings from 340 participants). AL2H rankings are below in Table 1. Next, in order to make sure these traits were descriptive across our range of love-to-hate characters, we rank ordered the 40 traits for each of the individual love-to-hate characters. These rankings can be seen in Tables 2a-d. Examining these rankings together, we see that four traits – *opinionated*, *persistent*, *intelligent*, and *stubborn* – were ranked among the top five most descriptive for AL2H and were also among the top ten highest ranked traits for *every* love-to-hate character rated (however, these traits were not necessarily among the top five for any *one* particular love-to-hate character). In addition, these four traits received a rating of 5.0 or higher mean absolute rating for each of the four love-to-hate characters.

Similarly, *mischievous* was ranked in the top five for AL2H (see Table 1). For every love-to-hate character besides Schmidt, *mischievous* received an absolute rating of 5.0 or higher (and *mischievous* was ranked #1 for Loki and #3 for Draco; see Table 2a and Table 2c).

We also explored the lowest ranked traits for both the self and the love-to-hate characters. For all the love-to-hate characters combined (AL2H), *boring*, *lazy*, and *warm* were the three

lowest ranked (see Table 1). *Boring* was also in every individual love-to-hate character's bottom five ranked traits; *warm* was found in the bottom five for three characters (Darth Vader, Draco, and Loki; see Tables 2a-d) and *lazy* was in the bottom five for two characters (Darth Vader and Schmidt; see Table 2d and Table 2c). In addition, *trustful* was the fourth-lowest ranked trait across all the love-to-hate characters and appeared in the bottom five for two of the characters (Draco and Loki; see Table 1, Table 2c, and Table 2a). Rounding out the least descriptive traits for love-to-hate characters overall (AL2H) was *forgetful*, which was in the bottom 10 (least descriptive) for all four of the love-to-hate characters separately (see Table 1 and tables 2a-d).

The participants also rated the likeability of all 40 traits, which can be used to describe how likeable or unlikeable the traits are that are either very descriptive or not very descriptive of love-to-hate characters. The highest likeability rating went to *humorous* at 6.54 (see Table 3). Only two of the love-to-hate characters had *humorous* in their top ten, Schmidt ( $M=6.11$ ) and Loki ( $M=5.60$ ; see Table 2a and 2c).

The top four most descriptive traits across the love-to-hate characters (*intelligent*, *persistent*, *opinionated*, and *stubborn*) varied considerably in their likeability ratings. Both *intelligent* ( $M=5.99$ ) and *persistent* ( $M=5.28$ ) were rated higher than 5.0 for likeability on a 7-point scale (see Table 3). *Intelligent* was the only trait highly associated with love-to-hate characters that also made it into the top ten most likeable traits (see Table 3). *Opinionated* was ranked near the middle of the traits in terms of likeability ( $M = 4.85$ ) and *stubborn* was ranked the ninth least likeable trait ( $M = 3.81$ ; see Table 3).

The three least likeable traits were *boring* ( $M=2.30$ ), *aggressive* ( $M=2.49$ ), and *irresponsible* ( $M=2.72$ ; see Table 3). *Boring* was also the least descriptive for the love-to-hate characters (see Table 1). In contrast, *aggressive* was rated 2.49 on likeability but was seen as

quite descriptive of love-to-hate characters, earning a rating of 5.36 for the combined measure (AL2H) across all love-to-hate characters together (see Table 3 and Table 1).

Although describing love-to-hate characters was the primary goal for our first research question, we can similarly describe admired characters (which will become more important when we get to answering our second research question). We collapsed mean trait ratings across the five admired characters that qualified. Of the participants, 104 provided trait rating for Hermione Granger (*Harry Potter*), 103 provided trait rating for Jessica Day (*New Girl*), 43 provided trait rating for Damon Salvatore (*The Vampire Diaries*), 74 provided trait rating for Christina Yang (*Grey's Anatomy*), and 128 participants provided trait rating for Tony Stark (Marvel Franchise). The top five ranked traits across all admired characters were *intelligent*, *loyal*, *persistent*, *opinionated*, and *helpful* (see Table 4). These traits were both ranked in the top five and had mean ratings of 5.0 or higher. The bottom ranked traits across all admired characters were *lazy*, *boring*, *forgetful*, *irresponsible*, and *passive* (see Table 4).

Our second research question was to examine how descriptions of love-to-hate characters differ from descriptions of admired characters and descriptions of the self. Three of the four traits that were most descriptive for love-to-hate characters overall were also found in the top five traits for admired characters overall: *intelligent*, *persistent*, and *opinionated* (see Table 1 and Table 4). *Stubborn*, although not a trait in admired characters' top five, was still rated higher than 5.0 with a mean of 5.79 (see Table 4).

The bottom ranked traits for the admired characters also included *boring* ( $M=2.10$ ) and *lazy* ( $M=1.84$ ; see Table 4). These two traits were also in the bottom three for love-to-hate characters overall, and *boring* was the lowest ranked trait for the self (*lazy* was the 10<sup>th</sup> least descriptive trait for the self; see Table 1 and Table 5). Every love-to-hate character had

*aggressive* in their top 11 with the lowest ranking being Loki with 5.59, which is still a high rating (see Table 2c), but *aggressive* was rated among the least descriptive traits for the self (among the bottom three traits; see Table 5).

None of the four most descriptive traits for love-to-hate characters (*opinionated*, *intelligent*, *stubborn*, and *persistent*) were found in the top five most descriptive traits for the self-rankings (see Table 5). However, *intelligent*, which was one of the top five traits for all love-to-hate characters, was among the top ten most descriptive traits for the self ( $M_{AL2H}=5.84$ ;  $M_{self}=5.61$ ; see Table 5). Additionally, *opinionated* and *persistent* had absolute ratings above 5.0 for the self, which means these traits were still highly descriptive of the self (see Table 5).

### *Euclidean Distance Results*

For our third research question, we used Euclidean distance to compare the degree of similarity or difference between love-to-hate characters and the self, and between admired characters and the self. Euclidean distance uses an n-dimensional model to create an absolute value difference score that, in this case, represents the overall similarity or difference between the self and the character (admire or love-to-hate) accounting for multiple traits at once (Kriegeskorte et. al., 2008). Each trait represents an axis, and each target (character or self) is a point with coordinates on the axes for every trait. Each point on the trait axis represents a difference score between the self and the character. Smaller values equal less difference and thus greater similarity, whereas larger values equal more difference and less similarity.

Euclidean distance can be calculated using the formula:  $d(self, character) = \sqrt{(self_{T1} - character_{T1})^2 + (self_{T2} - character_{T2})^2 + \dots + (self_{Tn} - character_{Tn})^2}$  (Tabak, 2014, p. 150). For this study, analyses were conducted using the core package in R, version 2.6.2.

We determined eight sets of target adjectives (using ratings found in our earlier descriptive analyses) on which to assess similarity of love-to-hate characters to the self and to admired characters. Those sets were: 1) Top five traits that most describe admired characters overall (using the created variable computed across all admired characters on average); 2) Bottom five traits that least describe admired characters overall (using the created variable computed across all admired characters on average); 3) Top five traits that most described love-to-hate characters overall (using the created variable computed across all love-to-hate characters on average); 4) Bottom five traits that least described love-to-hate characters overall (using the created variable computed across all love-to-hate characters on average); 5) Top five traits that most described the self; 6) Bottom five traits that least described the self; 7) Top five most likeable traits; and 8) Bottom five most unlikeable traits (see Table 6).

For each participant, we computed the Euclidean distance score between the self and the character using the five adjectives in each set. This distance score is a measure of similarity that allows us to then run paired sample and independent samples *t*-tests, to test differences in similarity between the self and love-to-hate characters and between the self and admired characters. We ran both types of tests because not every love-to-hate character had an admired character pair for the paired samples *t*-test, whereas independent samples *t*-test allowed us to look at all love-to-hate characters and all admired characters jointly. For Euclidean distance results, smaller distance indicates more similarity and bigger distance indicates less similarity.

In the Euclidean distance tests, we found that in general, love-to-hate characters were significantly more different from the self than admired characters for all adjective sets except one (see Table 7). The only set of adjectives that did not yield significant results was the set with the bottom five admired traits, where the Euclidean distance between love-to-hate characters and the

self was 5.22, and Euclidean distance between admired character and the self was 5.27 (see Table 7).

The Euclidean distances between the self and love-to-hate characters were closest on the top five traits most descriptive of admired characters, and second closest on the top five traits most descriptive of all love-to-hate characters combined (see Table 7). The self and love-to-hate characters were most distant on the top five most likeable traits, the top five traits that most described the self, and the bottom five traits that least described all love-to-hate characters combined (see Table 7).

The least distance between the self and admired characters was on the top five traits that most described the self, the top five most likeable traits, and the top five traits that most described admired characters (see Table 7). The greatest difference between the self and admired characters was for the bottom five traits that least described admired characters, the bottom five traits that least described love-to-hate characters overall, and the bottom five most unlikeable traits (see Table 7).

### *Paired Sample T-Tests*

We ran paired sample *t*-tests using Jamovi, comparing the Euclidean distance between the self and the love-to-hate character with the Euclidean distance between the self and the admired character for participants ( $n = 333$ ) for the three of the media sets (*Harry Potter*, Marvel Franchise, *New Girl*). This allows for a within-subject analysis to understand if the similarity between the self and love-to-hate characters is significantly different from the similarity between the self and admired characters. (Because not every media set had a clear love-to-hate character or clear admired characters, this comparison was not possible for some of the media franchises.



Participants who didn't have data for both a love-to-hate and an admired characters were not included in the paired sample *t*-test resulting in a smaller *n* than the overall sample.)

In running paired sample *t*-tests, we found significant differences in similarity on seven of the eight trait sets, always finding a greater distance between the self and the love-to-hate character than between the self and the admired character (see Table 7). The set of bottom five traits that least described admired characters was the only set not to have a significant result.

### *Independent Samples T-Test*

In order not to lose data from participants who had either only a love-to-hate character to rate, or only an admire character to rate, we also ran independent samples *t*-tests using Jamovi. This compares the Euclidean distance between the love-to-hate character and the self ( $n = 378$ ) with the Euclidean distance between the admired character and the self ( $n = 452$ ) as the dependent variable. As was the case for the paired sample *t*-tests, this test is also a two-way comparison looking to see if the similarity between the self and love-to-hate characters (but does not account for shared variance associated with the fact that some participants contributed two ratings to these comparisons and others only one).

Because of differences in distributions of variances, we used both Student's *t*-test, and more conservatively, Welch's *t*-test. For three of the sets of traits, we used, Student's *t*-test was most appropriate: admire bottom five, all love-to-hate bottom five, and unlikeable bottom five. For the other five sets of traits we used, the Welch's *t*-test was most appropriate: all love-to-hate top five, self top five, self bottom five, likeable top five, and admire top five.

The independent samples *t*-tests were significant when comparing six of the eight sets, again always in the direction of finding a greater distance between the self and the love-to-hate character than between the self and the admired characters (see Table 7). The two sets that did

not produce significant results were the set of the five least likeable traits and the set of the bottom five traits least descriptive of the admired characters.

## Discussion:

### *Findings*

This exploratory study looked to understand three specific things about love-to-hate characters: what traits are commonly associated with love-to-hate characters, how these traits compare with traits associated with admired characters and traits associated with the self, and last, who is closer to the self: love-to-hate characters or admired characters?

First, in answering what traits are commonly associated with love-to-hate characters, we found that four adjectives were consistently highly rated for love-to-hate characters: *persistent*, *intelligent*, *stubborn*, and *opinionated*. The traits *mischievous* and *aggressive* were also highly rated for love-to-hate characters. Prior research found these same themes to be common in online lay definitions of love-to-hate characters (Hoyt, 2019; *Love to hate*, n.d). For example, three of the traits (*stubborn*, *persistent*, and *opinionated*) are consistent with themes of determination and feeling strongly about one's beliefs. In addition, characters in prior research were often described as clever, quick, or intelligent, which is consistent with the results from the present study.

Prior research has found the Dark Triad to be associated with villains (Greenwood et. al., 2020). Since love-to-hate characters are often villains (or at least antagonists), we expected to find some elements of the Dark Triad to be present in the traits that were most descriptive of love-to-hate characters. And we did: mischievousness can also have similarly dark qualities to the Dark Triad personality triangle. Although not a trait in the Dark Triad, mischievousness has some similarities to Machiavellianism (e.g., affinity for manipulation and exploitation), psychopathy (e.g., thrill-seeking), and narcissism (e.g., entitlement; Spain et al., 2014). But there is also a playfulness to mischievous behavior that suggests the character is testing the limits of society's sometimes arbitrary rules (Parker, 2022). Potentially, love-to-hate characters fall

somewhere in the middle with a type of mischief that keeps viewers engaged without going too far, although this is just speculative. Likewise, we found that *aggressive* was one of the most descriptive traits of love-to-hate characters, which could be associated with the Dark Triad traits as well. *Aggressive* was rated low for likeability across our participants, but the study by Greenwood and colleagues (2020) found viewer levels of aggression, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy to be predictive of enjoyment of a villainous character. Our finding that *aggressive* and *mischievous* were highly associated with love-to-hate characters may point to a similar effect. Overall, the most descriptive traits of love-to-hate characters in the present study were not the most likeable, but they were also not the least likeable, suggesting the most descriptive qualities of love-to-hate characters are not *terrible* qualities to have, just not the best.

Looking now to the traits that were seen as *least* descriptive of love-to-hate characters, we found that they were very infrequently described as *lazy*, which is consistent with the pattern of determination found in the traits that were highly descriptive of love-to-hate characters. In addition, love-to-hate characters aren't *warm* or *boring*. The traits that love-to-hate characters are *lacking* seem to be descriptive of villainous characters with less of the "love" aspects. Potentially, the absence of certain qualities is what makes them both loved and hated. In addition, this could also mean characters must fit within a certain standard to remain likeable or enjoyable by viewers and that certain traits are more important than others for them to be seen as love-to-hate. For example, as we saw earlier, aggressiveness is acceptable in our love-to-hate characters which can represent the "hate" part of these characters, but laziness is not liked and therefore the absence of this trait allows for the character to also be "loved."

Three of the four love-to-hate characters we studied had a number of similarities: science fiction/ fantasy worlds, magic and/or powers. In addition these three love-to-hate characters all

belong to blockbuster franchises. Schmidt (from *New Girl*) was a little different from the other three. He is in a comedy series and isn't an antagonist in the same way the other characters are. However, it is still notable that we find a similar pattern of traits for him as the other characters, which strengthens the idea that love-to-hate characters have some distinctive features regardless of media genre or narrative role.

In order to expand upon what differentiates love-to-hate characters, we now turn to our second research question that explores differences and possible similarities among love-to-hate characters, the admired characters, and the self. There was a lot of similarity between traits used to describe admired characters and traits used to describe love-to-hate characters. *Intelligent*, *persistent*, and *opinionated* were in the top five most descriptive traits for both love-to-hate and admired characters. These common qualities don't seem to be exclusive to love-to-hate characters but instead, describe most of the fictional characters examined in the present study. Interestingly these traits are not among the highest rated in likeability (although intelligent was rated higher than 5.0, it was not among the top five most likeable traits) which suggests that we might not seek out people with these traits to be our friends, but we like watching characters that exhibit them. It's possible that these traits simply make an interesting character, whereas likeability ratings are more representative of a social standard and less about what makes a character enjoyable to watch. Or possibly, this represents a form of self-expansion: we wish we could be more *intelligent*, *persistent*, and *opinionated*. These questions would be interesting to explore further in the future and could tell us more about what differentiates love-to-hate characters from other characters.

In addition, there are some patterns shared among all three targets: the self, admired characters, and love-to-hate characters. We do not think of ourselves as *boring*, and we also do

not think that of these two kinds of characters. Of course, characters are written to be interesting and keep the attention of the audience. Although we don't have any data to explore this, it would be interesting to examine whether unambiguously hated characters are rated as *boring*, or if the trait of *boring* simply doesn't apply to any fictitious characters at all (at least not ones that are box office successes).

In addition, participants chose characters they were most familiar with which means they are probably more likely to find the character interesting. *Intelligent* was consistently highly rated trait for both types of characters, for the self, and on likeability. We are clearly drawn to engaging with intelligent individuals both in what we like to interact with, and what we choose to watch. Participants rated themselves as less intelligent than both admired characters and love-to-hate characters. Potentially, it may be important for the characters to be more intelligent in order to hold the attention of the viewer and create "why didn't I think of that?" moments. We like shows with big twists and turns rather than plot points that we can predict (Moore, 2015). This could potentially explain why we would prefer an intelligent character – because they may be more likely to "keep us on our toes." With that being said, it may also be the case that we don't want to love-to-hate people in our everyday lives and the traits that we like in these characters aren't applicable to the traits we search for in our relationships.

Through researching the traits associated with love-to-hate characters and comparing those results to admired characters and the self, we can define love-to-hate characters as complicated, whose aggression and mischief make them unlikeable in some ways, but whose intelligence and persistence in their beliefs and endeavors makes them likeable. Similarly, these characters act in a way that does not bore the viewer. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, love-to-hate

characters have both characteristics that people admire *and* ones that they do not think are so admirable.

Last, our third question sought to see who was closer to the self in terms of traits, love-to-hate characters and the self or admired characters and the self, using Euclidean distances. Euclidean distance results produce a distance score with lower scores indicating less distance and thus implies more similarity. In general, our participants saw the admired character and the self as being closer than they did the love-to-hate characters and the self (the latter had a greater Euclidean distances).

When examining the eight sets of adjectives for which Euclidean distances were determined, the greatest distance was found between the self and the love-to-hate character on the set of traits that were highly descriptive of the self, suggesting that love-to-hate characters do not *resemble* the self on characteristics that people view as most highly representative of the self. However, there was less distance between love-to-hate characters and the self on the set of traits that were most associated with admirable characters and between love-to-hate characters and the self on the set of most overall unlikeable traits. Possibly, part of the reason we enjoy watching these characters is because they are complicated in similar ways to ourselves. The Krause and Rucker (2020) study found that we like characters that are similar to ourselves whether on good or bad traits. Our data suggest something a little more nuanced for love-to-hate characters: although we may not see love-to-hate characters as a mirror to the self, they resemble us on traits we admire in others but also resemble us on traits we don't like.

An unexpected finding was that although certain traits are associated with admirable characters, they are not always likeable. Possibly what is admirable in a fictional character is not as admirable in a real person and therefore is not something we like. Or further, the people we

find admirable are not individuals we know personally and instead represent a type of person we aspire to be. Perhaps it is easier to hold someone on a pedestal when there is distance between us and an admirable individual because we can focus solely on their admirable traits, whereas we can't always ignore unadmirable parts of our friends. Future researchers should explore whether traits we associate with admirable fictional characters are the same traits present in admirable real people, and whether these two kinds of admirable traits may differ in likeability.

We generally found less distance between admired characters and self than we did between love-to-hate characters and the self. Opposite to the pattern found with love-to-hate characters, the self and admired characters were closer on the set of traits that were most descriptive of the self and the set of traits that were overall most likeable. This is entirely consistent with a robust pattern found throughout social psychology of people viewing themselves in a highly positive light (Dufner et.al., 2019).

When running the independent and paired samples *t*-tests with the Euclidean distances we were able to compare whether or not the distance between the self and admired characters was significantly different from the distance between the self and the love-to-hate characters. The independent *t*-tests produced six significant results whereas the paired *t*-tests produced seven significant results. All of the significant results determined that people see themselves as more similar to the admired character than the love-to-hate character.

Of the two tests that were *not* significant (either in one test or both), only one result was in the direction of the self to being (non-significantly) closer to love-to-hate characters than admired characters, and this was for the bottom five traits that least described admired characters. For unlikeable traits, the self was closer to admired characters than to love-to-hate characters, but it was not a significant difference. We suspect this is probably just a function of



the fact that both admired and love-to-hate characters – as characters that we find enjoyable – are equally similar to the self, and notably, on unlikeable and unadmirable traits.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

One major limitation of this work is that the data set used because the survey was created to answer different questions from the ones posed here. Therefore, although we can compare love-to-hate characters to admired characters, we do not have ratings for *disliked* characters that can be used for comparison. In addition, the love-to-hate characters that were used in the current study were not ones selected by the participants as their idea of a love-to-hate character. Instead, they were characters that were frequently, but by no means unanimously, nominated as “love-to-hate” by another group of participants. In addition, some of the love-to-hate characters were also nominated as admired characters by that other group of participants; that may well have been the same with the participants in the current study, too.

Another limitation is the minimal representation of different genres present. Our love-to-hate characters came mostly from Sci-Fi/fantasy blockbuster franchises with the exception of one comedy. It could be possible that love-to-hate characters are more frequently found or featured in these more fantastical worlds – or perhaps love-to-hate characters in these genres are different from love-to-hate characters in other genres. Exploring a wider range of genres would show patterns of where these characters are or are not present. Similarly, the love-to-hate characters used in this study were all male presenting, which raises the question of whether love-to-hate characters are, in general, more likely to be male or, alternatively, whether the profile developed from this dataset primarily tells us what male love-to-hate characters are like and differently – other genders may produce different results. What we like about villains in men may be different for women or other gender identities.

The sample used in this thesis was composed of undergraduate students who received course credit for their participation. Therefore, this isn't a fully representative of a broader population and the results may not generalize. Further research could explore if the same results are found with a more diverse age group, as well a sample with more variation in socioeconomic status and other demographics. With a wider age group, we may see a different interpretation of love-to-hate characters or see no consistent pattern at all.

A next step for this research would be to expand to how people rate admired and disliked individuals they know personally compared to love-to-hate characters because this would further explore the idea of how love-to-hate characters may be ones that we simultaneously like and dislike, as well as how that ambivalence compares to our reactions to real people in everyday life. We have already begun looking at this with a survey that is currently ongoing and that explores these exact concepts. This survey asks participants to rate a love-to-hate character, a person they know and admire, and a person they know and dislike for a fuller range of comparison points. It would also be interesting to explore this further with ratings of villains, both those who are considered love-to-hate characters and those who are unambiguously hated villains. Are love-to-hate characters a middle ground between admired and hated characters? Or are they just more intriguing and/or more complex villains?

The intention of this project is to explore love-to-hate characters by studying their traits while also comparing their traits to those of the self and admired characters to understand more about why we may like such complicated characters. Of course, it is important to note that these characters are fictitious and represent a form of escapism for many individuals, whether that be a cathartic release, curious temptation, or plain and simple enjoyment. This research adds to the body of studies exploring the self and characters in media, TV, movies, books, that helps us to

understand how characters resemble or explain parts of the self, as well as to understand what characters we gravitate towards and why.

A recent article in *Psychology Today* posed a similar question to this study's, exploring why individuals seem to root for psychopaths in movies (Cohen, 2024). Cohen suggests we may get lost in the media we are watching in a manner similar to the way Butterick, Westgate, and Oishi's (2023) have identified as occurring during reading fiction in childhood. Butterick and colleagues found that children who read more had a broader world view and were more open to differing perspectives which, in the context of our study, could translate to being more open to villains and mischievous plotlines by bad characters (Butterick et al., 2023). Enjoying these characters may thus be a better indication of our open-mindedness than an indication of our immorality. Drawing from this current research, it would seem that one reason for enjoying these characters could be because they share certain qualities with the self. It also seems that these bad characters are not so bad after all and truly do exhibit a medley of good and bad, likeable and unlikeable, admirable and unadmirable qualities.

In addition, there is very little research into "love-to-hate" characters especially considering the apparent growing interest in these characters via online platforms. Although this thesis can start the conversation and suggest interpretations of the results, much of the work into why complicated characters are so compelling to viewers is yet to be done.

## **Conclusion**

This exploratory study looked to explore what traits love-to-hate characters commonly display in order to define what these characters are in a systematic way. We found that love-to-hate characters are similar to both admirable characters and the self but in different ways. Love-to-hate characters display traits we associate with admired characters, but also display unlikeable traits similar to the self. Love-to-hate characters are quite similar to admired characters which suggests that certain traits may be important for interesting or enjoyable characters, but love-to-hate characters are also complex and unique, sharing in both good and bad qualities. At the end of the day although their behavior is often unlikeable, some of their traits may pull viewers in and cause us to root for them anyway

## Tables

Table 1: Combined Variable for All Love-to-Hate Characters Results

Adjective	Mean	SD
Opinionated	6.26	0.98
Stubborn	6.11	1.10
Persistent	6.03	1.05
Mischievous	5.95	1.49
Intelligent	5.84	1.08
Aggressive	5.70	1.42
Rebellious	5.63	1.73
Blunt	5.57	1.47
Independent	5.49	1.55
Impulsive	5.39	1.48
Observant	5.28	1.36
Tough	5.12	1.57
Stern	5.10	1.53
Adventurous	5.04	1.55
Brave	4.89	1.55
Lonely	4.88	1.74
Humorous	4.84	1.74
Emotional	4.74	1.83
Popular	4.74	1.67
Irresponsible	4.69	1.76
Eccentric	4.68	1.72
Creative	4.57	1.61
Sociable	4.46	1.74
Enthusiastic	4.20	1.79
Anxious	3.87	1.76
Loyal	3.79	1.98
Cautious	3.76	1.62
Awkward	3.50	1.58
Optimistic	3.43	1.68
Honest	3.42	2.08
Helpful	3.28	1.65
Reliable	3.19	1.83
Passive	3.04	1.83
Calm	2.97	1.59
Openminded	2.92	1.55
Forgetful	2.82	1.40
Trustful	2.80	1.81
Lazy	2.54	1.40
Warm	2.52	1.51
Boring	2.26	1.34

Table 2a: Love-to-Hate Character “Draco Malfoy” Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Opinionated	6.43	0.83
Aggressive	6.33	0.95
Mischievous	6.26	1.04
Stubborn	6.08	1.13
Blunt	6.02	1.20
Persistent	5.92	1.14
Rebellious	5.61	1.52
Stern	5.56	1.31
Intelligent	5.38	1.24
Impulsive	5.21	1.42
Popular	5.21	1.34
Tough	5.02	1.55
Observant	4.97	1.39
Lonely	4.84	1.70
Irresponsible	4.77	1.45
Emotional	4.54	1.75
Independent	4.52	1.70
Adventurous	4.44	1.52
Brave	4.27	1.61
Sociable	4.16	1.67
Anxious	3.87	1.59
Loyal	3.82	1.79
Creative	3.77	1.37
Eccentric	3.73	1.45
Cautious	3.63	1.48
Humorous	3.59	1.54
Awkward	3.11	1.51
Enthusiastic	3.07	1.52
Lazy	2.97	1.45
Honest	2.93	1.83
Reliable	2.87	1.38
Passive	2.86	1.77
Calm	2.77	1.40
Forgetful	2.77	1.29
Optimistic	2.66	1.40
Boring	2.65	1.45
Helpful	2.30	1.15
Trustful	2.28	1.23
Openminded	2.03	1.13
Warm	1.57	0.88

Table 2b: Love-to-Hate Character “Schmidt” Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Opinionated	6.42	1.06
Persistent	6.23	1.06
Humorous	6.11	1.05
Stubborn	6.08	1.16
Sociable	6.00	0.97
Emotional	5.95	1.22
Intelligent	5.88	0.96
Enthusiastic	5.77	1.22
Loyal	5.71	1.41
Eccentric	5.65	1.55
Blunt	5.37	1.60
Honest	5.35	1.43
Independent	5.22	1.39
Reliable	5.17	1.25
Popular	5.12	1.26
Trustful	5.03	1.47
Observant	4.97	1.44
Anxious	4.95	1.70
Impulsive	4.83	1.61
Helpful	4.72	1.32
Stern	4.57	1.52
Cautious	4.54	1.65
Mischievous	4.45	1.56
Aggressive	4.32	1.57
Optimistic	4.28	1.59
Awkward	4.22	1.54
Adventurous	4.20	1.49
Creative	4.20	1.45
Brave	4.14	1.36
Warm	4.12	1.40
Tough	3.75	1.42
Lonely	3.66	1.54
Rebellious	3.37	1.61
Passive	3.32	1.79
Irresponsible	3.19	1.64
Openminded	3.15	1.44
Forgetful	2.92	1.43
Calm	2.31	1.30
Boring	2.28	1.32
Lazy	1.99	1.23

Table 2c: Love-to-Hate Character “Loki” Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Mischievous	6.67	0.97
Rebellious	6.58	0.82
Independent	6.28	0.98
Intelligent	6.17	0.80
Stubborn	6.09	1.01
Opinionated	6.08	1.01
Persistent	5.91	1.04
Adventurous	5.69	1.21
Observant	5.68	1.17
Humorous	5.60	1.18
Aggressive	5.59	1.20
Impulsive	5.51	1.39
Creative	5.49	1.34
Tough	5.42	1.30
Irresponsible	5.41	1.52
Brave	5.33	1.25
Blunt	5.32	1.51
Lonely	5.26	1.57
Eccentric	5.20	1.52
Stern	4.83	1.51
Enthusiastic	4.43	1.50
Sociable	4.23	1.57
Emotional	4.11	1.71
Popular	4.01	1.78
Cautious	3.71	1.55
Optimistic	3.66	1.59
Calm	3.58	1.64
Awkward	3.49	1.45
Openminded	3.47	1.47
Anxious	3.29	1.59
Passive	3.27	1.85
Helpful	3.05	1.39
Forgetful	2.82	1.37
Lazy	2.67	1.41
Loyal	2.64	1.57
Honest	2.47	1.75
Warm	2.45	1.23
Reliable	2.17	1.41
Boring	2.09	1.26
Trustful	1.95	1.38



Table 2d: Love-to-Hate Character “Darth Vader/ Anakin Skywalker” Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Tough	6.62	0.62
Aggressive	6.60	1.01
Persistent	6.36	0.73
Impulsive	6.36	1.14
Rebellious	6.31	1.16
Stubborn	6.31	1.20
Brave	6.26	1.01
Opinionated	6.12	1.04
Independent	5.98	1.35
Intelligent	5.93	1.20
Adventurous	5.86	1.35
Lonely	5.74	1.56
Stern	5.60	1.68
Blunt	5.48	1.55
Observant	5.36	1.45
Mischievous	5.36	1.72
Emotional	5.26	2.14
Popular	5.17	1.92
Irresponsible	4.64	1.90
Honest	4.52	1.98
Creative	4.38	1.83
Helpful	4.21	1.89
Loyal	4.19	1.90
Reliable	4.07	1.96
Eccentric	4.02	1.76
Enthusiastic	3.93	1.94
Anxious	3.91	2.00
Humorous	3.74	1.85
Sociable	3.50	1.94
Awkward	3.41	1.88
Optimistic	3.33	1.95
Trustful	3.21	1.72
Openminded	3.17	1.86
Cautious	3.02	1.65
Forgetful	2.81	1.73
Warm	2.69	1.62
Calm	2.69	1.75
Passive	2.36	1.81
Lazy	1.91	0.96
Boring	1.76	1.12

Table 3: Likeability Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Humorous	6.54	0.88
Loyal	6.44	0.88
Reliable	6.39	0.96
Helpful	6.35	0.84
Trustful	6.33	0.98
Warm	6.20	1.09
Honest	6.17	1.03
Openminded	6.14	1.04
Intelligent	5.99	1.02
Adventurous	5.98	1.06
Creative	5.89	1.08
Observant	5.86	1.07
Sociable	5.82	1.01
Optimistic	5.81	1.09
Brave	5.73	1.03
Enthusiastic	5.69	1.09
Independent	5.65	1.11
Calm	5.53	1.16
Persistent	5.28	1.20
Tough	5.16	1.31
Eccentric	4.86	1.45
Opinionated	4.85	1.38
Popular	4.75	1.27
Emotional	4.74	1.36
Cautious	4.65	1.22
Rebellious	4.33	1.42
Blunt	4.33	1.49
Impulsive	4.28	1.49
Anxious	4.16	1.38
Mischievous	4.08	1.58
Awkward	4.05	1.47
Stubborn	3.81	1.49
Lonely	3.76	1.32
Passive	3.58	1.51
Stern	3.55	1.43
Forgetful	3.31	1.38
Lazy	3.01	1.39
Irresponsible	2.72	1.34
Aggressive	2.49	1.45
Boring	2.30	1.24

Table 4: Combined Variable for All Admired Characters Results

Adjective	Mean	SD
Intelligent	6.56	0.85
Persistent	6.30	0.82
Loyal	6.24	0.92
Opinionated	6.16	1.12
Brave	6.08	1.06
Independent	6.00	1.25
Helpful	5.97	1.21
Creative	5.94	1.40
Reliable	5.93	1.26
Observant	5.91	1.14
Stubborn	5.79	1.39
Honest	5.70	1.36
Trustful	5.67	1.44
Humorous	5.62	1.31
Tough	5.62	1.54
Adventurous	5.52	1.39
Enthusiastic	5.38	1.60
Sociable	5.35	1.55
Blunt	5.21	1.83
Popular	5.18	1.64
Eccentric	5.12	1.63
Optimistic	4.96	1.78
Emotional	4.94	1.71
Stern	4.89	1.82
Openminded	4.86	1.57
Impulsive	4.78	1.84
Cautious	4.65	1.73
Rebellious	4.48	1.96
Warm	4.47	1.91
Mischievous	4.16	1.84
Aggressive	4.13	1.93
Anxious	4.07	1.77
Calm	3.98	1.65
Lonely	3.76	1.66
Awkward	3.75	2.00
Passive	3.35	1.82
Irresponsible	3.15	1.94
Forgetful	2.69	1.64
Boring	2.10	1.32
Lazy	1.84	1.15

Table 5: Self Results

<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Loyal	6.26	0.83
Observant	5.96	1.14
Reliable	5.90	0.978
Trustful	5.84	1.17
Helpful	5.82	0.93
Humorous	5.81	0.96
Openminded	5.76	1.03
Honest	5.66	1.02
Independent	5.65	1.14
Intelligent	5.61	0.96
Warm	5.43	1.14
Anxious	5.42	1.52
Opinionated	5.30	1.34
Adventurous	5.27	1.31
Enthusiastic	5.24	1.18
Persistent	5.24	1.16
Sociable	5.22	1.36
Cautious	5.15	1.26
Emotional	5.14	1.52
Creative	5.05	1.38
Optimistic	5.03	1.34
Stubborn	4.98	1.42
Calm	4.90	1.34
Tough	4.85	1.42
Brave	4.80	1.22
Eccentric	4.46	1.35
Forgetful	4.40	1.63
Awkward	4.40	1.57
Impulsive	4.38	1.52
Blunt	4.28	1.54
Lazy	4.15	1.57
Passive	4.12	1.48
Popular	4.06	1.38
Lonely	3.96	1.69
Rebellious	3.65	1.47
Mischievous	3.56	1.50
Stern	3.50	1.39
Irresponsible	2.98	1.35
Aggressive	2.96	1.51
Boring	2.90	1.35

Table 6: Adjective sets

All L2H Top 5	AL2H Bottom 5	All Admire Top 5	All Admire Bottom 5	Self Top 5	Self Bottom 5	Top 5 Likeable	Bottom 5 Unlikeable
Opinionated	Forgetful	Intelligent	Passive	Loyal	Mischievous	Trustful	Forgetful
Stubborn	Trustful	Persistent	Irresponsible	Observant	Stern	Reliable	Anxious
Persistent	Lazy	Loyal	Forgetful	Reliable	Irresponsible	Loyal	Irresponsible
Mischievous	Warm	Opinionated	Boring	Trustful	Aggressive	Humorous	Lonely
Intelligent	Boring	Brave	Lazy	Helpful	Boring	Helpful	Boring

Set	L2H <i>M</i> Euclid	Admire <i>M</i> Euclid	Independent <i>t</i> -test	Independent <i>t</i> -test <i>p</i>	Paired <i>t</i> -test	Paired <i>t</i> -test <i>p</i>
Self Top 5	6.04	2.79	19.64 Wt	<.001	19.74	<.001
Likeable Top 5	6.05	2.81	19 Wt	<.001	19.92	<.001
Admire Top 5	4.32	3.34	8.63 Wt	<.001	9.49	<.001
Self Bottom 5	5.77	4.84	6.72 Wt	<.001	11.57	<.001
AL2H Bottom 5	5.91	5.08	5.94 St	<.001	10.81	<.001
AL2H Top 5 Unlikeable	4.42	3.87	4.79 Wt	<.001	6.83	<.001
Bottom 5	5.1	4.99	0.83 St	0.41	3.63	<.001
Admire Bottom 5	5.22	5.27	-0.46 St	0.65	0.3	0.76

Table 7: Euclidean Distance Results

Wt: Welch's *t*-test

St: Student's *t*-test

## Appendix

Full set of characters:

Marvel Franchise	Grey's Anatomy	Harry Potter	New Girl	Vampire Diaries	Star Wars
Tony Stark (Iron Man)	Meredith Grey	Harry Potter	Jess Day	Caroline Forbes	Luke Skywalker
Tony Stark (Iron Man)	George O'Malley	Hermione Granger	Winston Schmidt	Bonnie Bennetto	Leai Organa
Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow)	Derek Shepard	Ron Weasley	Nick Miller	Damon Salvatore	Han Solo
Loki	Christina Yang	Draco Malfoy	Cece Parekh	Stefan Salvatore	Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader

Full list of traits:

Loyal	Creative	Passive	Lazy
Intelligent	Enthusiastic	Tough	Anxious
Honest	Calm	Humorous	Forgetful
Openminded	Reliable	Opinionated	Blunt
Brave	Optimistic	Emotional	Aggressive
Warm	Stern	Rebellious	Irresponsible
Helpful	Persistent	Eccentric	Mischievous
Independent	Observant	Lonely	Awkward
Sociable	Cautious	Trustful	Popular
Adventurous	Impulsive	Boring	Stubborn

All questions asked in main study:

About participant:

- Age
- Gender
- Trans or cis
- Race
- Sexual/ romantic attraction
- Neurotypical or neurodivergent
  - Description of neurodivergence, if selected
- Media choice from a list of 6 Marvel Franchise, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Harry Potter*, *New Girl*, *Vampire Diaries*, *Star Wars*)
- 7-point scale, how well 40 traits (see above) describe:
  - Self
  - 4 pre-selected characters from their media of choice (see above)
  - Their favorite character, if they chose to respond for a fifth character not explicitly asked about (optional)
  - General social desirability
- Perception of \_\_\_ for all 4 characters from the media chosen (plus additional one if chosen)
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Trans or cis
  - Race
  - Sexual/ romantic attraction
  - Neurotypical or neurodivergent
- How similar or dissimilar the character is to them on \_\_\_ for all 4 characters plus additional optional character if chosen
  - Life expectancy
  - Personality
  - Interpersonal relationships
  - Current challenges
  - Goals
  - Identity
- How much do you like or dislike the character?
- How much do you admire the character?

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